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IN MEMORIAM

OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

IN MEMORIAM.

A DISCOURSE

UPON THE CHARACTER AND DEATH OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

PREACHED IN POTTSTOWN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ON THE DAY OF

NATIONAL HUMILIATION, JUNE 1, 1865.

BY

REV. JOHN C. THOMPSON.

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PORTSTOWN, JUNE 7th, 1865.

J. C. Thompson.

Rev. and Dear Sir :—Being deeply impressed and highly delighted with your *able and eloquent* discourse of Thursday morning, commemorative of the virtues of our late illustrious and martyred chief magistrate, and feeling assured that by asking a copy of it for publication, we express the cordial wish of all who heard it, and of many who only heard *of* it, we the undersigned most respectfully solicit a copy of said discourse, that we may give it to the public at as early a day as possible.

By granting this request you will greatly oblige,

Reverend and Dear Sir,

Yours very Respectfully,

ROBERT CRUIKSHANK,
J. L. LANDIS,
A. L. CUSTER,
MILLER D. EVANS,
D. H. KEIM,
M. H. RICHARDS,
J. DUTTON STEELE,
D. H. BEECHER,
EDW S. DAVIES,
HENRY POTTS, JR.

PORTSTOWN, JUNE 7th, 1865.

Respected Sirs :—I comply with your request, not from a feeling that there is anything in the discourse really worthy of publication, but only from a desire to place on record my position towards, and estimation of one whom in the future it will be deemed an honor to have appreciated and sustained.

Thanking you for your complimentary note,

I remain very truly Yours.


J. C. THOMPSON,

To Rev. R. CRUIKSHANK,

Rev. J. L. LANDIS,

MILLER D EVANS, Esq.,

Mr. J. DUTTON STEELE, and others,



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II. Samuel, iii. 38.

KNOW YE NOT THAT THERE IS A PRINCE AND A GREAT MAN FALLEN
IN ISRAEL?

The first object for which every congregation should convene in the sanctuary, is to discover the Divine goodness, so that from that discovery they may ascribe glory to God. And when in the course of Divine Providence a crisis of public peril appears, either Political or Ecclesiastical, the goodness of God is often seen no less clearly in the master spirits, which are raised up to meet it, than in any other department of His Providential government. In beholding such men, every rightly affected heart must beat more truly in gratitude to that God, whose Providence furnished, sustained, and crowned with success their noble efforts. And whatever of praise we may ascribe to him, in memory of whose death we are here assembled, a loftier praise shall ascend to Him, of whose hand he was the noble workmanship.

We are here to mourn for one over whose death the lamentation of a mighty people is heard to-day. That wild and melancholy wail of grief, which started weeks ago from our National Capitol and was borne upon the blast to the remotest regions of the civilized world, has returned again,

and its returning echo seems almost as fresh and loud to-day as when it first struck upon the startled ear of the nation : and we, taking advantage of the softened feelings of the heart, which this returning wave of sorrow has occasioned, would pay a tribute to one whose memory every lover of freedom in all ages to come will delight to honor.

A better estimate of the man whose death we mourn might perhaps be made by throwing up a hasty background upon which to view his virtues. The position he occupied ; the unparalleled circumstances by which he was surrounded ; the troubled stage upon which he acted his part ; all serve to magnify the natural greatness of Abraham Lincoln's character.

The Government, to whose Administration he was called, was upon the very verge of dissolution ; and that, not by sudden inflammation, but by evils which were chronic and growing. These evils, seen and acknowledged by the noble founders of the Government, instead of being outgrown in the nation's progress, as they had fondly hoped, had only increased with the national growth and developed with the nation's enlargement. For long years the leaven of evil had been working, and the process of disintegration had been going on. All the array of talent which could be called from the mighty resources of the Republic had been put to the strain to prevent the nation's falling into ruin. The stalwart shoulders of Webster and Clay and their contemporary giants were barely sufficient, even in their day, to

steady the rocking walls and the trembling pillars of the Union. These supports had all passed away. The Republic had grown in size but lessened in compactness. The strength and the malignity of its enemies had increased, and to every sagacious mind the day was at hand which was to determine the life or death of the American Republic. Aye, more than this: which would in all probability determine the political destiny of the world, and settle the question whether a Republican form of government should exist on this globe; It was not a question which confined itself to American interests merely, but one whose interests were co-extensive with mankind—widening until it reached the poles and stretching downward to the latest generations.—It was the awful “Armageddon” of politics, which was to settle at once and forever the problem of political freedom—and the question of man’s capability of self-government. It was the dawn of that day from the thought of which the gigantic soul of Webster recoiled with a shudder, and prayed that his eyes might be closed in death before they looked into the abysmal depths of its horrors. These were the circumstances under which Abraham Lincoln played his part.—It was when more than a million of men were waiting in feverish anxiety with their hands upon their sword hilts—when more than thirty millions were mute with despair or frantic with rage—when the whole country had already drifted within the outer circle of that political Maelstrom, and was fast driving like a rudderless

and broken ship toward its annihilating depths. These were his surroundings when he entered the chaotic arena and evoked from his mighty resources the present deliverance and the regeneration of the Great Republic.

It is one of the beauties of history, as well as a striking feature of Divine Providence that whenever and wherever an important and vital crisis presents itself either in church or state, a master spirit is immediately forthcoming to meet it; and it is worthy of note that in all the great revolutionary movements for the advancement of truth the leading spirits have been what are called self-made men; men in whose great souls there lay enveloped and folded up all the elements and principles of the reformation which they were instrumental in developing. Martin Luther and John Calvin were themselves the Reformed Church personified. Washington was himself the embodiment of the American Revolution. And the political regeneration of this Republic in its every element and principle existed in the mind and heart of Abraham Lincoln. He was its perfect personification, and future generations, in studying his character, may see the whole spirit of the contest, and the motives which actuated the nation in the mighty struggle. Look at the spirit of the contest as it lay in his great soul—its sincerity, its unselfishness, its forbearance, and its calm and deathless determination. And just so far as he was able without transcending his limited power he stamped the nation with the impress of his own spirit and made its constitution

and government a transcript of his own noble character. And as Divine Providence slowly but steadily by the beating waves of adversity broke down those barriers to reform, over which his honest truthful heart forbid his public policy to pass, the government gradually assumed that purity and freedom and constitutional perfection which had long lain as an ideal in his own soul.

No man perhaps in all the land so well personified the spirit of the nation, or could have furnished a more striking and perfect illustration of what man, with no antecedents but those of his inherent worth, may become under the benign influence of American Institutions than did Abraham Lincoln. Rising from an origin obscure, without means, without heraldic honor, without any external circumstances by which to climb—fostered and stimulated only by the genius of that government under which he lived, he attained by his own efforts to such a stately height that the nation caught him up as the tallest of her children and lifted him to her head. And as to the wisdom of his elevation an admiring world has already decided. His noble actions have passed into history. What Washington did for the nation in its first birth, Abraham Lincoln did for it in its regeneration. And there need be no envious feelings stirred by the comparison of these two great men ; no more than in the comparison of Moses and Paul. Each one marked an era in history. Washington was the master spirit of the Old Political Dispensation—Abraham Lincoln was the master

spirit of the New. The latter accomplished only what the former would have accomplished, had surrounding circumstances demanded it, or rendered it possible. And we do not bate one iota from the glory of Washington, a name brightening and becoming more loved with every passing year, when we say that Abraham Lincoln shall henceforth form the "Figure-Head" of the ship of state, which he remodelled by his skill, and which he purified and burnished by his virtues.

In describing the character of such a man, no clearly defined analysis can be given, especially by one who never enjoyed the privilege of coming near enough to its possessor to detect its outlines—to distinguish its less apparent virtues, or to become thoroughly acquainted with all its excellencies. Our picture must be like that drawn by one who stands off and looks from a distance upon some noble building, describing it as a whole, and marking only what stands out prominently to view—passing over the more delicate delineation—the rich cornice and fresco and finish which adorn and beautify the interior, and which can be seen only by those who are privileged to enter its secret chambers.

Among the qualities of his character upon which the public eye has looked with admiration, stands preeminent his integrity of purpose—an integrity which has already made his name a proverb—and which formed for his character a basis which made it in all its decisions as stable as the

Pyramids of Egypt. That single speech, made in the Cooper Institute, when he first began to rise upon the nation's view, and which to this day has remained unanswered and unanswerable, revealed in him a degree of intellect capacious as the Colosseum. His every noble quality revealed throughout the great struggle seems to invest his character with the richness and magnificence of the Parthenon—while over the whole was thrown a genial playfulness of disposition which seemed to light up the chambers of his soul with sunshine, and caused it to glow and sparkle with the timely and irrepressible flashes of wit. His extraordinary degree of common sense rendered him almost incapable of falling into mistakes. His seemingly unpolished manners, which to senseless brains was unpardonable, was only the natural and rugged beauty of nature, as far superior to those who criticized him as the unadorned face of nature is superior to the painted landscape. In his character was the simplicity of a child combined with the strength of a giant—the purity of a christian with the courage of a martyr. Through every vicissitude of this unparalleled struggle his great soul was equal to the occasion. Through all his public career at the nation's head, the Providence of God, the current of popular feeling, and the policy of his administration, ran strikingly and beautifully parallel. Every public act and proclamation seemed to come at the right time, and was appropriately adapted to the necessity of existing circumstances. His calling out of

seventy-five thousand men for ninety days, was not as the short sighted supposed, a failure on his part to comprehend the magnitude of the struggle, but a measure springing from a thorough knowledge of men, and showing that he deemed it indispensable that his policy should keep pace with the progress of popular feeling. Every act of his administration seemed as fitting and opportune as if it had been mortised and grooved by the suggestions of Supernatural wisdom; and future generations will see it as they calmly contemplate his public acts.

He was great in adversity by his fortitude;—a man of heroic faith, because that faith rested upon the superintending Providence of a righteous God. His very name seemed to be the gathering point of the nation's confidence. In those dark and dreadful hours of reverse his giant soul stood above the storm, because, as he himself declared, he knew "the prayers of the whole church were constantly ascending for his success." And Oh! What a sight to look back upon was that:—When the mighty pendulum of destiny seemed to be vibrating with uncertainty: back and forth; now to this extreme of victory, now to that of defeat; there he stood between its oscillations, as the instrument of Divine Providence, steadily weaving out the nation's future to a pattern defaced and soiled by no dark spot of slavery, but embellished with the glories of universal Emancipation. He was great in prosperity by his moderation. He exercised forbearance and gentleness under provocation, where in

hearts less noble, humanity itself would have been lost in revenge. His great object was to save the Union and purify the Nation. When that was accomplished, he was ready to issue amnesty, to forgive, and to restore, where justice itself seemed to revolt. And what shall we say more of one who seems to be still rising in the estimation of the world? Is it rashness to pronounce him the ablest, the best man in the whole nation? I am relieved from the responsibility of the declaration, for the finger of Providence pointed him out as such, and the overwhelming opinion of the American people expressed at the ballot-box confirmed the decision.

But we have assembled to-day for a sadder purpose than to admire the virtues and to rejoice in the excellencies of that great man whom God gave to us as a leader. We are a nation of mourners, deep in the vale of humiliation, and our lamentations for his loss must be mingled with our admiration for his virtues. Abraham Lincoln has gone! And I would not harrow up the feelings of this assembly by alluding to the manner of his death; a tragedy which will remain as a dark, indelible, heart-sickening spot upon the pages of history for all time to come, were it not that his memory is endeared to us by the very manner of his departure, and that his virtues seem to glow and sparkle with a more intense lustre when viewed upon the background of that dark scene in which he passed from the stage of life. Can you ever forget that sad morning in which you heard

of the President's death?—a morning girt all round with gloom—a morning, the darkest that ever rose from the womb of midnight upon the American people. All night long the terrible news had been flitting here and there, and like gloomy spirits from the nether world had been creeping in the darkness along the quivering nerves of the country, and men woke up to hear the startling news: *Abraham Lincoln was murdered!* Oh! God!—It was as if some spell had fallen from heaven upon the nation, paralysing its every movement and transfixing it with horror. Every countenance turned to ashy paleness, and every tongue seemed dumb with silence. Strong men bowed down with grief, and the lion-hearted wept like children. The wounded veterans in the hospitals forget their pains and start up as from the gate of death. The very soldiers seem to clutch their weapons with nervous desperation as if some invisible but terrible enemy had suddenly sprung at the nation's heart. Low and sullen mutterings of revenge were heard rumbling in the mighty bosom of the populace, swaying and surging it like the billows of uncontrollable wrath, and Justice seemed to hold his breath until the murderer was lifeless in his iron grasp. And then, after the first reaction from the dreadful shock, every mind instinctively turned to the scene of death, and the streams of affection, and sorrow, and sympathy from millions of bruised hearts flowed out to the chamber where the good man lay. The whole nation was in feeling and sympathy, assembled

at the dying bed of Abraham Lincoln. And there he lay a martyr to the Country's good.

"Oh Death! made proud with pure and princely beauty!"

* * * * *

"This is the very top, the height, the crest of murder's arms
This is the bloodiest shame, the wildest savagery,
The vilest stroke that ever wall-eyed wrath
Presented to the tears of soft remorse;
All murders past do stand excused in this."

And then so unexpectedly it came. We had thought that the dark days were over. It was the last desperate dying act of the Rebellion. The closing battle of the contest had been fought, and as the smoke of that battle rolled up, the departing fiend of the Rebellion seemed to enter it—to quickly condense it into a cloud—to wheel it over the National Capitol and to discharge its last lightnings at the nation's head. But how swift and terrible was the sword of justice in its work, for before that good man's form was laid to rest, the avenging fires had consumed the very building which gave to the assassin a temporary refuge—his guilty spirit had curled upward in those flames, and the dogs had licked up the murderer's blood.

But let us turn from this gloomy and forbidding scene to thoughts more cheering and hopeful, for there is comfort to be extracted from even this prince of calamities. That stroke which startled the nation did not alter the purposes of Jehovah. Abraham Lincoln lived until his work was accomplished. The fatal shaft of death, came too late to

alter the issue of the conflict. It seemed necessary that he should live to direct the efforts, and sustain the hopes of the nation until the fury of the storm was expended and God kindly granted us that. He was taken from the earth, but not until he had given freedom to an oppressed and downtrodden race—not until the fatal line of Mason and Dixon was completely obliterated. He lived until that traitorous rag had given place to the venerated “Stars and Stripes” upon the battered and blackened walls of Sumpter. He lived until the victorious legions which moved in obedience to his will had entered the fire-wrapt city of Richmond—until he himself had entered that lair of treason, and surveyed the glory of his triumph. He lived until he had sent forth that manly Proclamation, well worthy to be his last, notifying the unfriendly powers which had sneered at us in the day of trial, through a treacherous neutrality, that our flag must be respected and enjoy its full and equal rights in every Port that sentinel the ocean. He died when all those splendid victories came trooping up and revealed to his gladdened vision the dawn of peace—when the flag was proudly streaming from the mast-head of the ship of State, with “not a stripe erased nor a single star obscured.”—When the shouts of triumphant thanksgiving were rolling through the land—and the Paeans of victory still lingered in the higher regions of the atmosphere—the spirit of Abraham Lincoln passed upward to God who gave it.

And what an alleviation does it furnish for the nation's sorrow to behold the effects which his death produced upon the hearts of men. Hearts before discordant seemed in unison then, consolidated by the shock as the heart of one man. When was there ever a sorrow so universal, or a lamentation so profound? When did lifeless King or Queen or Potentate draw after them such a mighty aggregate of love and sympathy and flowing tears, as that funeral pageant silently wending its way through the country's heart? The pulse of business stands still as the procession passes. Men of all shades and nationality press forward to do it honor. *The very prisoners peering through their grated cells, reverently uncover their heads as the procession passes. Four millions of swarthy freemen, send up a wail of grief as for the death of their deliverer. And look all over the enlightened world if you would take in the aggregate of sympathy. Where was the death that had ever occurred which lowered the flags of Christendom to half-mast? Oh! It is wonderful, and it shall stand on record as a wonder of history, that the first class Powers so deeply mourned the death of an American President. And is it not worth almost the agony it cost, to have the Royalty of the world see how the President of a Republic can be loved and respected, and how deep is the place that he may occupy in the hearts of the people?—And when he suddenly falls, even in the midst of a revolution, to see

*At Sing Sing the prisoners stood with hats off.

how the whole machinery of the government moves on without a jolt, or even a dissenting voice? Surely our bereavement, sad as it is, is not without its redeeming features.

Abraham Lincoln has indeed gone : but he still lives by the force of his example, and that example shall tell upon the people for generations to come. His virtues shall still live in the memory of a grateful people. His name is interwoven with the nation's history. Like as in that masterpiece of sculpture, the statue of Minerva, executed by the chisel of Phidias, with his own likeness inwrought so delicately and so inseparably upon the shield, that that likeness passed down and carried to future ages the sculptor's fame imperishable as the statue which bore it,—so the fame of Abraham Lincoln, so inseparably wrought upon the nation's shield against this rebellion : and his virtues so emblazoned upon the armorial ensigns of the Republic, shall pass down the ages contemporary with the nation's life, and deathless as the nation's history.

Abraham Lincoln ! The Union Saved ! who shall ever divorce the two, or think of them separately while the vestal fires of patriotism burn in the heart ?

Abraham Lincoln ! Emancipation ! where is there a heart upon this globe where man is struggling for freedom that will not cherish the association ?

Look around upon the land to-day, and see the rival cities, each desirous of having his monument set as a gem

in their bosom. Let those monuments go up, for it is well to honor the illustrious dead ! But a loftier and a more enduring monument has its foundations already laid and its walls in process of re-construction ; for as the traveller in foreign lands enters that vast cathedral which swells from the heart of the British Metropolis, and vainly looks for the monument of Sir Christopher Wren who planned the building, but lifting his eye catches the inscription : “ *If you seek his monument look around.* ” So in future years when pilgrim feet, flying from the shadow of the despot’s throne shall visit this land, and tread this mighty temple of human freedom, when they behold its spreading dome—its Corinthian pillars—its ponderous architraves—its gorgeous windows, through which streams the pure air of freedom, they may read upon its every glory, “ Behold the monument of Abraham Lincoln.”

With this day perhaps will close the public honors to our “ fallen Chief,” but individual hearts will do him honor, and private tongues will continue to speak his worth ; and oft in coming years, when these sad scenes of blood shall all have passed away ; when the peaceful waters of the Potomac shall have cleansed the gore-sodden soil which lines its banks ; and when nature shall have kindly covered up, with her luxuriant robe of harvest the battle-scarred and blackened bosom of the earth ; unnumbered pilgrim feet shall wend their way to the great man’s tomb, and bitter tears will fall upon the sacred soil where the Chieftain sleeps !

Abraham Lincoln has gone ; but we fondly hope, and we cherish the belief, that God has given a peace in heaven, to him who did so much to secure an honorable and lasting peace in the bosom of the country which he so nobly served.

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